



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

July 27, 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed decision notice is for the hand removal of all Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), and limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) trees from approximately 1,550 acres of sagebrush grassland on the Robb-Ledford and Blacktail Wildlife Management Areas. Tree removal would be completed using mechanical methods. In areas of low tree density (large majority of the project area), trees would be felled, bucked, and scattered, with remaining debris left to decompose naturally. In areas of high tree density (large minority of the project area), trees would be felled, piled where practical, and burned when dry. Broadcast burning in areas where piling slash is not practical due to the volume of material may be considered, in cooperation with Montana Department of Natural Resource and Conservation. No new roads or trails would be constructed. This is a non-commercial project.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on June 10, 2017.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 31 days through July 10, 2017. The EA was mailed to the standard FWP Region 3 distribution list; legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte), Madisonian, and Dillon Tribune newspapers. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. One written comment, in support of the proposed project, was received during the comment period.

Based on the Environmental Assessment, the public comments received, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision to go forward with Alternative A, the proposed action. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be mailed to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Robb-Ledford and Blacktail WMA Conifer Removal Project
Attn: Dean Waltee
PO Box 758
Sheridan, MT 59749
Or e-mailed to: dwaltee@mt.gov

Thank your interest.

Sincerely,

Shirley Swecker
Acting Region Three Supervisor
Attachment



Region Three
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1400 South 19th Ave
Bozeman, MT 59718

July 27, 2017
Decision Notice for:

**Robb-Ledford and Blacktail Wildlife Management Areas Non-Commercial Conifer
Removal Project Draft Environmental Assessment**

Proposed Action

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) proposes to maintain, enhance, and expand sagebrush grassland on the Robb-Ledford and Blacktail Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) through removal of expanding conifer forests. The proposed action would remove all Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), and limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) trees from approximately 1,550 acres. Tree removal would be completed using mechanical methods. In areas of low tree density (large majority of the project area), trees would be felled, bucked, and scattered, with remaining debris left to decompose naturally. In areas of high tree density (large minority of the project area), trees would be felled, piled where practical, and burned when dry. Broadcast burning in areas where piling slash is not practical due to the volume of material may be considered, in cooperation with Montana Department of Natural Resource and Conservation. No new roads or trails would be constructed. This is a non-commercial project.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on June 10, 2017.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken from June 10, 2017 through July 10, 2017. The EA was mailed to the standard FWP Region 3 distribution list, and the distribution list maintained by the Sheridan area Wildlife Biologist.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received one (1) comment regarding the proposed action. That one comment was in favor of the proposed action.

Summary of Comments supporting the proposed project: One (1) total.

"I am in full support of the proposed habitat improvement project on the Robb-Ledford and Blacktail WMAs. It is very encouraging to see FWP moving in this direction and starting to address declining sagebrush and aspen plant communities on these critical winter ranges. I am confident the planned treatments will benefit big game as well as many non-game critters that rely on shrubs and deciduous species. Hopefully your effort will trigger more of this type of work on FWP lands as well as other public and private properties. Furthermore, I am eager to participate in volunteer efforts to get the work done on the WMAs and will recruit additional help as needed."

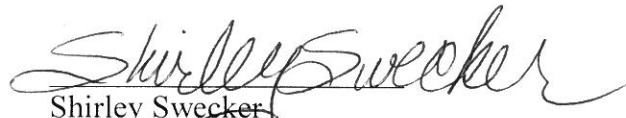
FWP Response: FWP recognizes the comment and appreciates the feedback regarding the proposed action.

Summary of Comments opposing the proposed project: None (0) received.

FWP Response: No opposing comments were received.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and FWP evaluation, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed action, Alternative A, as described in the Robb-Ledford and Blacktail Wildlife Management Areas Non-Commercial Conifer Removal Project Draft Environmental Assessment. This alternative allows for hand removal of conifer trees from approximately 1,550 acres of sagebrush grassland from the Robb-Ledford and Blacktail Wildlife Management Areas.


Shirley Swecker
Acting Region 3 Supervisor
